

## forwards, beckon, rebound

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## forwards, beckon, rebound

by [Aenqa](#)

### Summary

Dream understood the risk he was taking. If power corrupted, then divinity consumed. How many war gods had spawned from people unable to tame their violent impulses? How many ordinary men had been turned into natural disasters?

But Dream was young, sound of mind, good at heart. He was sure he could handle the burden of becoming a god.

(He was wrong.)

[A retelling of the story of the Dream SMP in which Dream is a young god, George is his tether to humanity, and history is working against them.]

### Notes

This story focuses on the Dream SMP story and thus offers an interpretation of the SMP characters of Dream and George, not the real people. It will be told in four parts. Although it is canon divergent in some ways, it stays mostly true to the original Dream SMP story.

Title and chapter names taken from [the gorgeous song by Adrianne Lenker](#). I highly

recommend giving it a listen while you read, as it's not only a beautiful song but also really informs the story.

The cover art which appears in the first chapter was created by the INCREDIBLE [@septiceyeliner on Tumblr!](#) Go give her edits some love, she is amazing and makes such quality edits. This cover makes FBR feel like a legit book and that makes me extremely happy :)

Finally, special thanks to prinedemeter for encouraging me to post this and not get stuck in a perfectionist spiral :)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)



stabbing stars through my back

**FORWARDS**

**BECKRON**

**REBOUND**



## *Archive of Our Own Aenqa*

When the sun sets, the obsidian walls surrounding L'Manburg look like a blank, empty void sinking into the air. Dream might as well have cut out that piece of sky entirely. Collapsed it into a bottomless pit.

He supposes he could do that, if he wanted, and the knowledge sends a cold thrill of satisfaction down his spine. He's standing on top of George's castle, looking out over their land.

*Dream's* castle, he corrects internally. *Dream's* land.

There are footsteps behind him. Dream doesn't move.

"Seems like you really got it through their skulls," George says, stopping at Dream's right shoulder.

A quick smile jerks itself across Dream's face. "I think so."

He can tell George is looking at him, but he doesn't look back. "And you're sure all this is necessary?"

"Tommy burned down your house, George. *The king's* house. He can't keep getting away with stuff like that."

"I don't care about the house, Dream," George says, his voice weary. "I don't think you care that much, either."

Dream turns to look at him, then. He told George to wear the cape and the crown to give him an air of legitimacy, but in the evening light, the outfit looks a little too much like a costume. Like George is a dress-up doll. And his sad expression just makes him look pathetic.

"Does it matter?" Dream asks, turning back towards the view of the SMP.

George sighs. He places a hand on Dream's arm, which shocks him – Dream pulls away, and George's face goes dark. "Am I not allowed to touch you, now?" he says, bitter.

The words touch some place guilty inside of Dream. "Sorry," he feels himself saying, like an old reflex.

George doesn't try to touch him again.

"Do you remember when we first came to this place?" he says instead.

"Of course I do," Dream says.

"Do you remember what you told me then?"

He does.

---

It was a new land. Untouched, uninhabited. Ungoverned. If any god had ever commanded these hills and valleys, they were either dead or disinterested, and Dream could feel the power in the air, unclaimed and searching for a host.

“We should just leave it alone,” George said, as they took a break from building their little house on the lake. He and Dream were standing on the path, gauging their progress, as Sapnap continued laying brick on the other side of the house. “It’ll only make things complicated.”

“Things will get complicated regardless,” Dream argued. “Someone else will come by, and they’ll take the power for themselves. Don’t you think it should be one of us?”

George crossed his arms, his brow darkening. “Divinity isn’t that simple, Dream.”

Of course it wasn’t. If power corrupted, divinity consumed. How many war gods had spawned from people unable to tame their violent impulses? How many men turned into natural disasters?

But Dream was young, sound of mind, good at heart. He felt sure he could shoulder the burden. After all, he held no ambition except to turn this untamed land into a home – a safe place for him and those he loved. A safe place for others, too, in a world ravaged with danger. Wasn’t that a noble goal?

“We’ve been traveling for so long,” he said, grabbing George’s hand. “I want a place where we can stay. For good.”

George laced their fingers together, soft and sure. “I don’t want to lose one of us to this.” His gaze pierced right through Dream. “I don’t want to lose *you*.”

Embarrassed that George could so clearly see the decision he had already made, Dream dipped his head. “You won’t lose me,” he said firmly. “I won’t misuse my power. I won’t use it at all, except to protect us. And if I start to lose control – I’ll have you. I’ll have Sapnap. You’ll pull me back.”

George didn’t look convinced, and his gaze didn’t sway. A breeze rippled over the lake, playing with his hair. “If I asked you not to do this,” he said, “would you?”

Dream took a deep breath. “Are you? Asking?”

George bit his lip. His eyes flickered down.

Then he said, “No. Not today.”

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Divinity froze Dream from the inside, burning like ice against bare skin. His first day as a god was spent writhing in bed, consumed with a bizarre, cold fever that ripped through him like a blizzard. George sat with him for hours, his hand combing through Dream’s hair as Dream gasped into his shoulder, shaking.

“This hurts, George,” he whispered, his mind whirling in the gusts of power – wondering if he had

made a mistake, if he had overestimated his own strength –

But George pulled him closer, the touch grounding, and said, “It’s okay, Dream. Just breathe.”

Dream’s mind latched onto George’s words as his hands held onto him like an anchor. George was more familiar, at this point, than his own body and mind, tethering him strongly to the world, warming him against the storm.

The next day, he was able to get to his feet, and by the third night, he was standing with George and Sapnap outside of their house on the lake, looking out at the wilderness in front of them.

“So,” Sapnap said, crossing his arms. “You gonna show us what you can do?”

Dream flexed his hands, feeling the molecules in the air offer to shift beneath them. His mind was lit up, like he was connected to everything he was seeing. It was all so personal, the spruce trees clambering for the sky, the caves whispering beneath the earth.

To Sapnap, he said, “I don’t think I should. I don’t think I should do anything I couldn’t normally do, unless I need to.” He felt he had a handle on the thing that had taken residence inside of him, and he didn’t feel the need to provoke it.

“That’s a good plan,” George said, grabbing his elbow. The touch felt bizarre. It was so small, compared to the vastness of what Dream was experiencing.

“Come on,” Sapnap complained, rolling his eyes. “You can give us *one* little show.”

Dream looked at George, who shrugged, and nodded. “Okay.”

He wanted a firework in his hand, and so there was one. That was all it took – the ease of it shocked him, almost scared him. He lifted it up and Sapnap stared at it, agape, before he set it off. It exploded, streaking the night sky with red and blue.

“Wow,” George mumbled, as Sapnap laughed in amazement, clapping his hands once.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Sapnap said in a roar, his voice echoing over the hills, “welcome to Dream’s kingdom!”

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Dream held true to his word. He went about his days as though he had never changed, tilling the soil, expanding their home brick by brick. Soon, more wanderers started to join them – good people with kind hearts, names like Alyssa, Callahan, Sam. Dream knew each of them and liked them, and he could tell they respected him. That was all he needed.

Things were peaceful. They farmed, they fished. They sat on the roof of the house Dream had built with Sapnap and George and watched the stars.

Dream and George stole moments together wherever they could, in their rooms at night or somewhere in the deep, quiet forest that surrounded them. What they had together – it wasn’t a secret, but it was something private and precious, more precious than anything Dream had ever known. His feelings for George only grew stronger as his power slowly developed, their connection searing something deep and true inside of him.

When George pulled Dream against him, kissing him, the fire in his chest reminded him that he was still Dream, not just deity. George's hands warmed him where they touched him, focusing him. He would push forward, holding George almost possessively in his arms, his mind fuzzy, intoxicated with touch.

"I'll keep you safe," he promised George night after night, whispering it into air warmed with breath, feeling a surge of satisfaction to know that he could keep his promise. "I swear I will."

George wouldn't respond. He'd just pull him closer.

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Tommy was, at first, an amusement. A novelty, maybe.

Unlike the others who had drifted into his land, searching for something Dream could give them - security, safety - Tommy seemed insatiable. He was impetuous, unafraid of the power Dream clearly held. He blurred the line between courage and recklessness until they became indistinguishable.

Dream liked it. Tommy provoked him not because he wanted Dream's power, but because he respected it – because Dream was the greatest challenge Tommy could find.

So he let Tommy stay. Gave him a place, gave him a claim to a part of Dream's land. He agreed to let some of Tommy's friends follow after him.

He regretted it the instant he met Wilbur.

Unlike Tommy, Wilbur did not look at Dream with wild-eyed wonder. His gaze was evaluating – almost condescending.

"This is your land, then?" he asked on his first day, standing with Dream on the wooden path he had constructed to connect the corners of his territory.

"That's right," Dream said, pulling himself up. "The SMP."

In front of them, Tommy and Tubbo raced down the path, screaming with laughter. The forest was thinning, buildings slowly replacing trees. The land was developing into something new.

Wilbur nodded, pursing his lips as his gaze flickered over Dream. "And how are you liking divinity so far? You're a young god, right?"

Dream blinked and crossed his arms. "How can you tell?"

Wilbur shrugged. "I've known a few others." A smile quirked at his lips. "They haven't always impressed me."

"Well, it's going fine, for me," Dream said, feeling defensive. "I took this on because I had to, not because I wanted power. This is a peaceful place for me and my friends. If you can abide by that, then you're welcome to stay."

A long moment passed before Wilbur dipped his head, deferential – or maybe mocking.

"Understood," he said, stuffing his hands in his pockets and strolling down the path, calling for Tommy and Tubbo, who trailed after him like ducklings to their mother.

Dream watched him go and felt something cold and jealous twist in his chest.

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Those walls. Those fucking walls. Like an enormous middle finger in Dream's face. A kick in the shins. Absolutely no reason for it. Absolutely nothing wrong in the SMP, no conflict, no war. And Wilbur decided to build a fucking fortress.

"He's an asshole," Dream told George, standing on the hill overlooking the black and yellow monstrosity. Ice clawed its way up his throat. "He's a fucking asshole."

"Have you asked him why he's doing it?" George asked.

"I told him and Tommy to rein it back a little, and now he's declaring independence. He's like a fucking child," Dream raged, his fists clenching at his sides. For a moment, he saw the walls collapsing; he could do it with a few flicks of his wrist, if he gave into the desire.

But then George's hand was on his arm, and Dream took a shuddering breath, dropping his shoulders. "It's okay, Dream," he said. "Don't lose control. We can figure this out ourselves."

Dream jerked his head. He knew he could be angry without giving into rage. He could keep control over this. But as he kept looking at *L'Manburg*, he felt cold claws sinking into his chest, refusing to let go.

"I won't use my power," he said, his words short and sharp. "But this *nation* can't exist. They can't ask for my protection while spitting in my face. They can be a part of the SMP, or they can leave."

"Okay, then," George said, and Dream turned his head. "We'll fix it."

---

The war should have been short and efficient. Eret was easily won with promises of false power, and the rebels never stood a real chance of victory. Yet they kept fighting, even once they had lost everything, practically taunting Dream to take things further. To make things worse.

Dream held no desire to kill any of them. He never had. *They* were the ones who had started this. *They* were the instigators.

So when Tommy's hubris finally eclipsed his self-preservation and he challenged Dream to a duel, he took the opportunity. He took the chance to end it.

They strung their arrows and took their positions, the world still and frozen around them. Wilbur counted the paces, his voice grating in Dream's ears. His hands were cold, and he moved almost automatically, feeling the divine chill creep up his chest. He shoved it down; he was doing this himself, like he had promised George. Playing fair.

"Ten paces, fire!"

Dream turned and let an arrow fly.



It missed. It missed by inches, and Tommy's arrow whistled towards his chest –

It splintered in the air and fell away, and Dream strung back another arrow.

His affection for Tommy was gone. This time, he wanted his arrow to hit. So it did.

Tommy hit the ground. Tubbo screamed. Wilbur rushed to his side.

“Cheating bastard!” Tommy shouted, blood pouring from the wound in his shoulder.

Dream turned and saw George staring at him, his gaze dark and disappointed.

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“What did you want me to do, instead? You wanted me to die?”

“Obviously not, Dream.”

“Then what should I have done?”

“I don't know, okay? I don't know.”

“Tommy and Wilbur *started* this. *They're* the ones causing conflict, not me -,”

“Dream, the only thing they've done is wound your pride. That's the harm you can't handle, not anything else. You could have just let them alone – you could have just let them have their little country, and -”

“So that's what you think this is? You think it's about my ego?”

“No.”

“What, then?”

“I think it's your deity.”

“...George.”

“I think you're losing yourself, Dream.”

“*George*. I'm not. It's still me, I'm still me, I'm still -,”

“You couldn't handle the fact that Wilbur didn't respect you. That he didn't – I dunno. *Pay* respects to you. You want control over what's happening. That's bad, Dream.”

“How – how is that bad?”

“Because you can't control people. I mean you *literally* can't. Even if you have power over them, you can't control them. And if you try, you're going to lose. *Everything*. ”

“...”

“Make a deal, Dream.”

“*What?* But we’ve already won -”

“Make a deal with Tommy. Give them independence. Make them happy. And then leave them alone.”

“Now I feel like you’re the one trying to control *me*, George.”

“...I think we both know that’s not possible.”

---

The discs felt heavy and cool in his hands. Dream didn’t know what they meant, or why they mattered so much to Tommy, really; but the way Tommy thrust them forward, his face screwed up like he had swallowed the bitterest of pills, was enough to tell Dream not to question it. Tommy saw this trade as worth the independence of his nation. Dream took the deal.

The revolutionaries celebrated late into the night, their lights and shouts bleeding over the walls. Dream watched from the nearby hill, tapping his fingers against the music discs that meant so much more than what they were. He still had power over this. He could still intervene, if he had to.

A warm hand pressed into his back. Dream straightened up and turned to see George, whose eyes were dark - black pools in the night.

“Are you coming back?” George asked, tilting his head towards their house.

“Yes,” Dream said, pressing his lips together in an imitation of a smile. “I’ll be there soon.”

George paused a second longer before nodding and turning away, walking down the wooden path alone, his shoulders hunched against the dark.

Dream watched him leave, and then he looked around the hill where he was standing. Without the fog of rage and jealousy, he realized for the first time how badly he had scarred his own domain; the deep gashes in the earth from dynamite, the burned-down trees that had once felt like friends. Regret sparked hot and shameful in his chest. And a voice in his head, familiar and soft, told him a truth he couldn’t ignore.

*You won’t be the same if you follow this path.*

Yet a whoop from L’Manburg still set his teeth to grit, and he turned back towards the rebel country. At the top of its walls, he saw Wilbur, celebrating his unearned victory, his arrogant laughter sending shards of ice down to the core of Dream’s being.

A different voice, this one quiet and fast like snowfall, said: *maybe you shouldn’t care.*

## **i'm not afraid of you now**

### Chapter Notes

happy new year! :)

Dream had lost himself in the war, if only briefly. And in the moment where divinity took hold, he left his forest razed, the parcel of land now called L'Manburg in ruins. He nearly killed Tommy. Put his friends in danger.

It scared him. And he found himself withdrawing, hard, from the power that he couldn't escape, embedded within him like thorns tangled around his veins.

He withdrew from everything. He left L'Manburg alone as Wilbur directed his meager citizenry through its reconstruction. Despite the artificial borders that were now imposed, he let Tommy run through his land, doing whatever mischief Tommy always seemed to be doing. He didn't get involved. He ordered the construction of a castle for Eret, who he named king of the SMP, hoping that he could be the neutral decisionmaker that Dream so clearly could not be.

And then, having vested temporary responsibility in others, he ventured out on long journeys by himself, far from the land he had claimed as his own. He brought maps and filled in the area around the SMP, searching for rare landmarks. He preferred to stay moving, as though motion could rid him of himself.

It wasn't as though anyone noticed his absence. Or if they noticed, they didn't care.

Well - except for one person.

George. George, who was angry with Dream for his long retreats, which often came with little notice and were always of an indeterminate length.

When he returned from his longest journey yet, he found George standing, arms crossed, in front of their home on the lake. It was only theirs, now; everyone else who had once lived there had since moved on, built their own permanent residences. Even Sapnap had his own house now. Dream and George were the only ones who remained.

Dream approached George slowly, like a dog with his tail between his legs. Guilty.

"Hi," he said, stopping in front of him.

George stared at him evenly. "Where have you been."

"Travelling," Dream said, ducking his head. He pulled a map out of his bag and held it out for George to see. George didn't move. "It's a Woodland Mansion," he said, dropping his arm. He had been so excited to find it, but now the words fell flat. "Very rare."

"Hm," George said, raising his eyebrows.

Silence.

“You were gone for *two weeks*,” George said then, and Dream felt his heart sink.

“It was far away.”

“You didn’t even tell me you were leaving.”

“I - I didn’t think I would be gone that long.”

“That’s not the point,” George said.

“And it’s not like you would have come with me, anyway,” Dream muttered, which was true. He had asked, once, and George had just shook his head.

“That’s not the point, either,” George said, frustration rising in his voice.

“Then what is the point?”

“The point is that you apparently hate it here so much that you won’t stay,” George shouted, and Dream suddenly noticed the tears shining in his eyes. “I’ve had enough of travelling, Dream. We’ve been travelling for years. Or have you forgotten?”

“Of course I haven’t,” Dream said, though perhaps he had - and George’s words conjured those distant images of the three of them, trekking across deserts and mountains and forests, forging rivers and oceans, always in search of something they couldn’t quite name. Something they had thought they had found, here.

“Our friends are here,” George said (though the words resonated strangely in Dream’s head) - “*I’m* here. Is that not enough for you?”

“Of course it is,” Dream said, guilt now swamping him. He pushed forward and grabbed George’s hands as George’s chin fell towards his chest. “George, this - this isn’t about you, okay? I’m - this is my fault. It’s just - it’s hard to explain.”

“Can you at least try?” George murmured, his gaze fixed on his feet.

A deep breath. “George,” Dream said helplessly. “I -,”

*I don’t feel like myself here. When I leave this place, I start to feel human - I start to feel more like myself. But when I come back, it’s like something else takes hold and replaces a part of me. I don’t like it, I don’t want it, I think I made a mistake. I think I might have lied to you, when I said that I was strong enough -*

“I’m afraid, George,” he whispered, and George’s gaze shot up just as his fell. “I - I don’t know if I can handle this. And I’m scared. I’m scared of what I might do if I lose control again.”

A long, still moment. Dream waited for the rebuke, waited for the anger and resentment. Waited for an *I told you so*.

Instead, a warm hand pressed against his cheek. Dream looked up, startled, into George’s face: soft, sad, determined.

“I am not afraid of you,” he said. “I know you.”

Dream’s heart stumbled in his chest. “But what if I’ve changed?” he murmured. “What if-,”

“Do you still love me?”

“Yes.” Fervent, true.

“Then you haven’t changed,” George said, his fingers brushing down Dream’s face, to his jaw. His touch, so familiar and so foreign all at once. “As long as you love me, you’re still yourself.”

That place inside of him, that hot, bright spot in the middle of his chest, the part the ice hadn’t reached, sparked to life, and Dream pushed forward to kiss George, just to feel the warmth start to spread.

---

He stopped going out on his long journeys, spent more time with the people and with the land. It made George happy, which made Dream happy. The downside, as he learned quickly, was that it was becoming harder and harder for him to ignore what was happening in L’Manburg.

“An election,” he muttered one day, staring at the poster hanging on the wall of Tommy’s house. It read, *VOTE POG!*

“Weird, right?” said Sapnap, coming up beside him.

*Weird*, Dream thought. Wilbur had - admittedly - done a fine job of running L’Manburg. Why call an election? Why put that in jeopardy?

“Who are you supporting?” Sapnap asked casually, as though it were a game.

“Nobody,” Dream said, resuming his walk on the wooden path. “They’re independent, they can do what they want.”

“Well, you know George is running, right?”

He froze and stared at Sapnap. “What?”

“Yeah,” George said, smiling up at him from their bed, where Dream had rushed to find him.

“Quackity asked me to be his Vice President, so I said yes.”

“Why?” Dream asked sharply, some indescribable emotion rising up in his chest.

George shrugged. “It sounded fun. Besides, you said it yourself - they’re still a part of the SMP. There shouldn’t be a problem with it, right?”

Dream’s fists clenched, unclenched, clenched.

There shouldn’t be a problem with it - right?

His problem was that George was treating this so casually, that *everyone* was treating this so casually, like power was nothing more than a novelty. Like it could trade hands as easily. Like it wasn’t risky, like it didn’t carry implications. Did these people not understand what power meant?



Were they so naive? Was *George* ?

“Right?” George prompted, breaking Dream out of his thoughts.

“Do you really think they’re taking you seriously?” Dream asked, the question coming out meaner than he intended. He saw George’s gaze darken. “I mean - is Quackity really taking you seriously? You need to be careful with stuff like this, George, I don’t want them to take advantage of you. It’s not a game -,”

“I can take care of myself, Dream,” George said, standing and crossing his arms. “I know what I’m doing.”

*Does he?* “Do you?” the words burst from his mouth.

George glared. “Yes. I do.”

Something cold, something jealous, something worried. Something in his chest, in his head, in his hands. He didn’t want this, didn’t want George to be involved with this. Why? *Why?* He couldn’t name it, couldn’t say it -

George put a hand on his shoulder. “Dream,” he said. “Stay out of this. Okay? Just stay out of it. It doesn’t really matter, in the long run.”

He was so wrong, and Dream knew it.

“I’m *asking you* to leave it alone,” George said, and Dream took a shuddering breath. In a monumental effort, he relaxed his fists.

“Okay, George,” he said.

“Thank you,” George said, and pressed a kiss to his cheek that barely registered. “Besides, you should be happy if I win. Better than Schlatt, right?”

Dream stared at him. “Schlatt?”

---

He had asked Schlatt to leave once before. He didn’t like him. Didn’t like the way he looked. Didn’t like the way he acted. Didn’t like him.

But L’Manburg was independent now. Wilbur could do what he wanted within his borders.

Dream didn’t care. He didn’t. Or he cared, but it didn’t matter that he cared. He could deal with it, could deal with watching Schlatt pace the L’Manburg border, a strange, hungry gleam in his eye as he stared at the SMP. His sleazy suit. The tie, always a little off.

*Schlatt.* Of course, it had to be Schlatt.

Dream sat back and let it all happen. The meaningless debates, the strange campaign strategies. It wasn’t his business, as George kept reminding him. It wasn’t his problem. L’Manburg had won its independence, and this was their reward. The ability to drag themselves into the mud in a bizarre contest of wills and personalities. The ability to tear themselves apart.

(Hm, Dream thought. Hm.)

It was still his land, but it wasn't under his control. All he could do was sit back and wait and watch it happen.

It took every modicum of self-restraint in his body.

"Who are you endorsing, Dream?" Tommy asked him one day, flashing his wild, unfiltered smile. He was still dressed in his revolutionary outfit, one of the few in the country who still held onto their war symbols. They had met just outside of the gates to L'Manburg.

"Nobody," Dream said firmly.

"Aww, come on, big man," he said. "I thought we were friends!"

Were they? Dream remembered that he used to feel affection for Tommy, but now he wasn't sure what he felt for him. It was a sort of detached interest, almost scientific. He thought that Wilbur was manipulating Tommy, stringing him along. Making him Vice President when Tommy did most of the work.

Or *was* it manipulation? Did Tommy even care about being President? What did Tommy care about?

(Hidden at home, a pair of silent discs.)

"We're not friends, Tommy," he said.

Tommy snorted and gave him a look, as if he knew better. "*Ooh, I'm Dream, I'm so big and mysterious and I've got ice in my veins and shit*," he suddenly said in a high-pitched voice, and Tubbo giggled nervously behind him. "Come on, man, just give me an old Pog 2020, for the ads!"

Dream stared at him in bemusement. Was he mocking him?

Tommy held his gaze, arrogant. Brash.

Before he could decide how to respond, Wilbur was calling for them from the walls, and Tommy offered Dream a sarcastic salute before running back towards the call.

Was there anything that could phase Tommy? And then, at the top of L'Manburg's walls, Dream saw the man with ram horns pacing, stroking his chin. Not campaigning, not making speeches, not participating in debates. Biding his time.

---

Dream stood next to George on the wooden path overlooking L'Manburg. The election went just about as well as Dream thought it would go. Meaning it went as poorly as possible.

"He dropped me," George said numbly, as Quackity took the stage next to Schlatt. "Like it was nothing. He'll be Schlatt's vice president."

Dream watched Wilbur and Tommy slink to their seats, defeated. Tommy looked pale and shocked, like he had watched something die in front of him. Maybe he had.

"I told you," he said before he could stop himself. "These people don't care about you." *Not like I do.*

He felt George's glare. "I get it, Dream. Thanks."

"It's okay," Dream tried to save. "We don't need them. We don't need any of them."

"They're still my friends."

Dream looked at him sharply. "Who is?"

"You know," George said, distracted - watching the stage as Schlatt continued to speak.

"Who?" Dream asked again, something cold clawing at his throat.

"Dream."

"George, why are you avoiding the -,"

"*Dream,*" George said again, grabbing his arm and pointing towards the stage, where Schlatt was finishing his sentence: "-and Tommy Innit!"

"What did he say?" Dream asked, and the first arrow flew.

It landed at Wilbur's feet, and then he was running, Tommy alongside him; they tripped over themselves, sprinting away from the podium as the other L'Manburg citizens aimed their bows in their direction. Tubbo, ashen and frozen in place, stood at Schlatt's side, as he grinned viciously. Niki, the only dissenter, screamed at him: "You can't do this! You can't -,"

And Dream watched on in astonishment as the country cannibalized itself.

---

Tommy and Wilbur disappeared into the trees, refugees of the country they created. L'Manburg tore down its walls, renamed itself. Took on a new identity. Began a new era.

Dream watched from a distance long after George had left. And when the last piece of the wall came down and the weary Manburg citizens filed off to their respective homes, Dream saw a single man walking down the path towards him, hands in pockets, chin lifted high.

"Schlatt," Dream greeted as the new president drew near.

Schlatt raised a hand, a smile playing at his lips. "Big D," he said. There was a joke in his voice - a mean one. (How did he sound so much like Tommy, and yet so different?) "Been awhile."

Dream inclined his head, his arms crossed.

"Saw you enjoyin' the show. What did you think? Was it dramatic enough? A little too much?"

"It was... interesting."

Schlatt laughed. "That it was. That it was."

Dream dropped his arms to his side, shifted to face Schlatt more directly. "I know we've had our...

differences in the past, but that doesn't extend to your country. As long as you uphold the treaties I set in place with Wilbur, we shouldn't have any problems."

Schlatt tsked, shook his head. "Not a big Wilbur fan. You sure we have to keep those same old agreements?"

"I'm sure."

He scrunched up his face, then said, "let's circle back on that one. Good talk, D," and he threw out a hand to clasp Dream's shoulder.

Dream's wrist snaked out and caught his wrist mid-air, iron-grip. Dream saw a flash of fear in Schlatt's eyes. He took a step towards him, felt the air around them flex as it quickly cooled. Spoke low.

"It's Dream," he said. "And don't fuck with me, Schlatt. You do whatever you want with your little experiment, and stay the fuck out of my land. Follow the treaties, and we won't have a problem."

Schlatt huffed. His warm breath was suddenly visible in the cold. "You - you can't do shit to me," he said with false bravado, failing to tug his arm away. "You don't want another war on your hands."

Dream had to fight not to smile. His nails dug into the flesh of Schlatt's wrist. "I would win."

Schlatt's jaw clenched.

"I'm staying distant as a favor to you," Dream muttered. He released Schlatt's arm and watched him stumble a few feet back, rubbing at his wrist. "Don't push it."

And then - and then, Schlatt nodded, fear in his eyes, and said, "Okay, okay. I won't." And he turned tail and ran, like the coward Dream could now see that he was. He felt distaste rising his throat like bile as he watched Schlatt scurry down the path. A coward, seeking false power. There was nothing less respectable.

---

Dream walked back to his house alone. As he passed the houses of Alyssa and Callahan, who Dream rarely saw these days, the lake where they had fished, the lemon trees Ponk had coaxed to life, Dream felt a bitter nostalgia for when things had been good and he had been in control. It was Wilbur who had ruined things, he thought. Or -- no. It was Tommy. Without Tommy, there would have been no Wilbur.

These stupid squabbles, these petty conflicts over petty power, they were starting to grate on his nerves. Sooner or later, he would have to draw the line.

(If only they could just listen to him. He knew what was best, he knew how to lead - they could live as they used to, in peace and harmony, living off the land, no need for war or politics. If there was ever such a thing as divine right, surely he had it - surely, when he was the land itself, when he could *feel it* crying out, when he could speak to it, *mold* it, when he could see the people he hated swallowed up by the land in an instant, if he wanted it hard enough. Why couldn't they respect him? Why couldn't they just *listen*?)

If there was one consolation, it was that he knew, ultimately, that Manburg was an experiment he was allowing to happen. Dream held the ultimate power, and if they stepped out of line, he would put them in their place.

He found George standing still in their home, his hands on top of a chest, lost in his thoughts. Carefully, Dream took his hand, led him to their room. He didn't need to sleep, but he wanted to lay with George for a while - to feel his warmth pressed into his side, thawing him.

When they curled up next to each other, George sat up on his elbow and kissed Dream, and Dream kissed back hard, possessive and relieved - relieved that he wouldn't have to share George, after all, with the country he hated so much.

Something metallic and wet flooded his mouth, and Dream broke away, gasping.

"George, I'm - I'm sorry, did I hurt you?" he asked, panicking, his hand flying to his lips as the taste of blood filled his mouth.

"What?" George asked, his brow furrowing. "You didn't hurt me, Dream."

"Didn't I -,"

There was an energy - a presence - suddenly - that sent Dream bolting to his feet, the smell of blood heavy in the air. He spun around, convinced there was someone else in the room, but there was nobody there. The air shifted and flexed, and he felt his mind spin.

"Dream, what's going on?" George asked, the words sounding distant, like they were being spoken into a canyon.

And then -

"Can you hear that?" Dream asked.

Words. A chant, building up in the air, steady as a pulse. He could feel it coming through the trees, perhaps even being shouted from the stars, a chant that he was suddenly sure nobody else could hear. A chant that sent terror down to his bone marrow.

His land was screaming, *blood for the blood god*.



# villain and violent

## Chapter Notes

ENORMOUS thank you to prinedemeter for their help with this chapter <3

I'm really happy with how this came out, and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ignoring George's questions and pleas, Dream slammed through the doors of their house and took to the woods, forging towards the power that was shrieking up from the land itself, emanating in waves from a single point. The god – and it must have been another god – was miles away, but their presence was as potent and repulsive to Dream as though they were close enough to spit in his face.

The closer he got, the stronger he felt it – the waves of sensation that threatened to overwhelm him: an uncertain shiver to the air; the acidic tang of blood in his nostrils; a burn settling into his skin – not George's comforting warmth, but a sickly heat that simmered like fever.

Primal, instinctual, urgent, a voice in his head: *Protect yourself. Protect your land. Protect your claim.*

Dream picked up speed, tearing through the forest with hardly a sound. Underneath the alien heat on his skin, the ice began to spread.

---

The pull of the other god's power led Dream deep into his forest until he was nearly stumbling over the edge of a ravine, sinking into the earth like a gaping mouth. The waves of sound seemed to pulse up from the dark crevice, as well as echoes of real voices and footsteps.

Dream retreated, scaled a nearby tree and hunched in its branches. He folded the night's shadows around him, obscuring himself as he watched Wilbur and Tommy slink out from the entrance of the cavern. They whispered to themselves as they crept close to the ravine's edge, peering suspiciously into the darkness, blind to Dream's presence. They moved like thieves, fearful and hungry, their faces and clothes scratched and torn from their flight to the woods.

And then an unfamiliar man appeared, so large that he seemed to dwarf them both. A cloak draped his broad shoulders in a deep red, a flash of white underneath. There was a strange edge to his motions as he twisted his neck, his gaze sweeping over his surroundings.

He turned his head to the side, and his form seemed to flicker: and Dream saw, for a moment, a kind of creature, like a wild boar, pointed tusks dripping with black blood, breath puffing from a twisted snout, scars and battle wounds sketched into leathery skin. Dream felt a blast of hot air, heard what sounded like a hundred screams at once, and the image was gone. The man was back. Dream's knuckles went white against the tree branch.

Wilbur stopped at the stranger's shoulder and whispered something to him. Dream threw his hearing towards them just in time to hear him to say the name, "*Technoblade*."

Something clicked in Dream's head. He had heard of Technoblade through the vague veil of myth, and from Tommy, who had bragged at every opportunity of his friendship with "the Blade." Apparently, he hadn't lied.

Wilbur disappeared inside the ravine, leaving Technoblade alone.

He looked up and directly at Dream.

It zapped Dream to the spot. He saw the man hum quietly to himself, then jerk his head to the side. Utterly unbothered, Technoblade started to stroll into the wilderness, turning his back to Dream.

And the sight triggered something in Dream's head, screaming *kill, kill, KILL*.

He hit the ground hard and sprinted towards him, instinctual rage blinding him, and lashed out with a hand –

Technoblade whirled. Caught the blow, iron-grip. A snap in Dream's wrist stopped him in his tracks. For a second they surged against each other – two equal and opposite actions. The smell of blood was pungent and repulsive in Dream's nose, and he grimaced.

"You don't want to fight me." Technoblade's voice was deep and smooth, a startling contrast to his revolting deity.

"Why not," Dream hissed.

Techno's forehead creased. "Is this the first time you've met another god?"

Dream nodded tersely, still struggling against his grip.

"That explains it," Techno said, and dropped his hand.

Startled by his casual demeanor, Dream took a step back as he rubbed his wrist. "I can – can *feel* you – I heard voices," he said harshly. "You're a danger to me."

"I'm not here to threaten you."

"But you could," Dream said.

"You're right."

The world amplified in Dream's ears: the wind tossing the trees, the scream of bugs from the grass and branches. Everything too loud, too much, crying out, and Technoblade saying: "We could fight. And do you know what would happen?"

Dream shook his head.

Techno took a step towards him, and with a shudder, Dream saw the image of the wild pig shiver

into being, his mouth twisting strangely as he spoke in a hoarse whisper. “We’d tear the fucking world open.” Cold trickled down Dream’s spine. “A crater from here to the opposite border of your land. No survivors. No chance to rebuild.”

Dream could see it in his mind’s eye, as clear as if it were real that very moment. The blood. The destruction.

“I don’t want that,” Techno said nicely. “Do you?”

He turned and started walking through the forest again.

Dream felt his feet picking up, though this time, he merely fell into step next to the other god. “If you’re not here to threaten me,” he said, “then why are you here?”

Techno sighed and brought a hand up to scratch his now-human face. “Wilbur needed me.”

“Wilbur.”

“I owe him a favor,” Technoblade said. “A few hundred favors.”

“And what is Wilbur planning to do?”

Was it a smile on his face, or a sneer? “I think Wilbur wants to destroy this country of his.”

Dream’s steps faltered. “He wants to destroy L’Manburg?”

“That gonna be a problem?” Techno asked, levelling his gaze.

“No,” Dream said, his mind whirling. He had resigned himself to the existence of that blight on his land long ago. He had only stopped himself from destroying it because – because of George. But – if *Wilbur* were to do it, instead –

“No,” he said again, feeling ice crack as it spread through his chest into his shoulders and arms.

“No, there’s no problem.”

Techno nodded. There was something increasingly familiar about him, as though Dream had known him for a long time. When he spoke again, his voice was evaluative. “Since we’ve established we’re not going to fight,” he said, “you have a few options. You can sit back and let me take care of things – or...”

“Or?”

“Or,” Techno said, “we work together.”

“To destroy L’Manburg.”

“Precisely.”

Dream hesitated. He thought of George. “I’m supposed to stay out of things like this,” he said, though the words burned his tongue.

Techno’s expression was skeptical. “Why? This is your land.”

“I promised someone - someone important - that I wouldn’t use my power like this,” Dream said. And he felt embarrassed. He felt his feet slide against what had once felt like equal ground.

Technoblade stopped and turned to him. “I understand the need to keep your attachments. Wilbur is evidence enough. But this -,” and Dream felt that rush of hot air again, the power he knew he could counter with his own, if he tried, “- *this* is what you are now, like it or not. These people, they are temporary. *We* are permanent.”

*Permanent.* Perhaps that should have terrified him. Perhaps that should have sent him running, or crying, or begging for it to be taken away.

But what it did, instead, was give Dream a deep feeling of satisfaction. Because he was finally doing something that felt *right* when he said, “Okay. I’ll help you.”

Shaking Techno’s hand felt more real than anything Dream had felt in months.

---

Beyond George’s assumed disapproval, Dream had several reasons to operate from the shadows in his assistance of the new traitors. The first reason was his agreement with Schlatt, which still bound him to the government of L’Manburg. The second was that Tommy, apparently, had no idea what was happening.

“He thinks we can take the country back,” Wilbur said, when Dream dropped by to quietly provide him with gunpowder and ammunition. “I know he’s wrong.”

Dream didn’t really respond. He just watched him. There was something different about Wilbur these days, something darker. He smiled when he saw Dream and spoke of the old days as though they had always been friends. As though they had always hated the country Wilbur built with his own blood and bricks.

A few weeks after he started to help Wilbur, he spoke to Schlatt again.

The President found him on the top of the tower closest to L’Manburg, where Dream had taken to sitting, watching over the country with an obsessive kind of care. Schlatt’s eyes were red, his breath stale, his shirt yellowing and crumpled, a half-empty bottle of whiskey in his hand. He sat heavily next to Dream, who pulled one knee towards his chest and leaned against it as they looked over the land. The sun was setting, and the country was awash in red and orange.

“Tubbo’s a fuckin’ traitor,” Schlatt said, and took a swig.

Dream hummed. He had seen Tubbo creeping back and forth from the ravine, as though his footsteps didn’t echo like gunshots in Dream’s ears. As though the twigs and pebbles caught in his hair and suit weren’t immediately obvious to everyone in L’Manburg when he returned.

“What are you going to do about it?” he asked.

Schlatt huffed, then laughed, then laughed harder, the whiskey sloshing in its heavy bottle. “*What,*” he managed, “would *you* do?”

Dream thought of how he felt when he first saw the black concrete walls constructed around L’Manburg’s little peninsula - when he first realized the depths of the arrogance of the people under his protection.

“I’d teach him a lesson,” he said, a bitter taste in his mouth.

“A lesson,” Schlatt breathed. “What kind of lesson?”

An idea took seed and started to sprout.

“Schlatt,” Dream said, “I think you should hold a festival.”

The lights in L’Manburg flickered and dimmed.

---

Wilbur was to destroy his creation at the festival. It was decided.

“Ashes to ashes,” he said to Dream, with a manic grin: “Dust to dust. It’s poetic, isn’t it?”

“Whatever you say,” Dream said, and handed over more gunpowder.

Better for the instrument of destruction to be Wilbur, hunched in his ravine, slowly losing his mind. Better for Technoblade, starved for conflict, to sharpen his weapons. Better for Dream to cautiously align himself with Schlatt - to make every appearance that he was respecting L’Manburg’s continued presence.

The only thorn in the side of his plan was Tommy. Tommy, who had found out. Tommy, who redemonstrated the depths of his ability to annoy and obstruct with every passing day.

“You stay the fuck away from here you manipulative green bastard,” he hissed at Dream when he caught him at the edge of the ravine. “You stay the fuck away from Wilbur.”

“Wilbur asked me to come here,” Dream said, irritation flashing in his chest.

“He’s not in his right mind,” Tommy said, shaking his head violently. “He’s not – he’s not *Wilbur* right now.”

“Seems like Wilbur to me.”

“Seems like you don’t know *shit*. So stay the *fuck* away from us.”

“What do you think is gonna happen, Tommy?” Dream asked, crossing his arms. “You think you’re gonna get your country back? After everything that’s happened?”

Tommy pulled himself up until they stood eye to eye, glowered, and said, “That’s fuckin’ right.”

It was startling. It was irritating. Tommy – Dream realized – was the only person left who really cared to oppose him. There was nobody else who treated him with this kind of disrespect. Not Schlatt, who desperately needed his protection; not Technoblade, who seemed only interested in sowing the kind of chaos that benefited Dream; and certainly not Wilbur.

Perhaps the only other person who wasn’t following his plan was Eret; Eret, the king, who was meant to be objective and impartial, who Dream saw walking through L’Manburg, whispering in hushed tones with Nihachu the dissenter. Eret was getting involved, which pissed Dream off; after all he had given him, all the power, he still felt the need to try and redeem himself? He couldn’t sit with his false title and be happy with it?

It didn’t matter. Dream had enacted his plan, and he would see it through. Nothing - not Tommy,



not Eret, not anything else - could stop it.

---

Except, perhaps, a flaw in his judgement.

Dream's mistake was not in directing Schlatt's actions at the festival: Tubbo's execution was spectacular, dramatic, and deserved. It drove a visible wedge into the remaining citizens of L'Manburg, causing them to turn on each other in fear and distrust.

It was not in working with Technoblade, who played his part perfectly, and whose violent outburst after the execution merely sowed more chaos and confusion into the already shattered nation.

It was in trusting Wilbur. And underestimating Tommy.

The explosions never went off. And later, when Dream stalked into the ravine to find Tommy screaming in Technoblade's face while Tubbo cowered behind him, Wilbur was doing nothing more than watching with a pleased grin.

"What happened?" he snapped as he pulled Wilbur aside.

Wilbur's smile froze. "It wasn't the right time."

"*Wasn't the right time?* The whole country was there, we talked about this, it was -,"

"Tommy wants to have a war," Wilbur interjected, laughing as Dream stopped short. "Caught you by surprise?"

"It's not *about* having a war," Tommy shouted at him, stalking towards them. "It's about saving L'Manburg from Schlatt."

He thought Schlatt was the threat? That was funny. Dream watched as Tommy started to plead himself into a frenzy: "You're not thinking straight, Wilbur, you're not seeing sense. You have to give me a chance to take it back. You can't just blow it all up."

"I think it's a fair request," Wilbur said, shrugging at Dream. "Let him have a go."

Dream turned towards Techno, who was unperturbed. He seemed sated by the blood splattering his hands and staining the edge of his sword, which he cleaned carefully, detached from the conversation. *He doesn't care about this*, Dream reminded himself. *He's only here for Wilbur*.

"We'll talk about this later," he told Wilbur, and they did, later that night, when Tommy was asleep; when the moon washed sickly pale light over the forest, and Dream and Wilbur could speak freely.

"What really happened today?" Dream asked, watching Wilbur pace the clearing, his head craned towards the starless sky.

"To be honest with you, Dream," Wilbur said, his voice lilting, "I had a button, right, I had a *button* that would blow it all up, and I couldn't *find* it. I couldn't find the button. It's stupid, I know, I know it's stupid. But it doesn't matter now."

Dream rubbed his forehead. "It does matter, Wilbur, because now you apparently want to have a

war, and it's -,"

"The war is good," Wilbur interrupted, rushing towards Dream, gesturing wildly, his eyes bright with fever. "The war is right. The war makes sense. We started with a war and we should end with a war. It's all a circle, Dream, you see? It's a loop, a loop, a cycle, a self-fulfilling prophecy. It ends like it started, with me, with the war, with the bombs, and then it's done, it's over, and you – *you have your land back*, Dream. I know that's all you care about, I know! I'm going to make it happen, Dream, I promise. No matter what happens in the war, I'm *going* to blow everything up. I swear."

Dream thought about what Wilbur was like when he first arrived, proud and purposeful; when he had led with the authority of a general and the sanctimony of a philosopher. When it took nothing more than a condescending glance from him to send Dream into a searing, jealous rage.

"You've changed, Wilbur," he said, though he wasn't sure why. "Do you know how much you've changed?"

Wilbur's eyes gleamed in the moonlight, and he said, "Do *you*?"

---

The silence of the SMP, the piecemeal path, which had been destroyed and put back together a hundred times by now. Dream's footsteps, alone with their echo. His head was down, lost in thought. There would be war tomorrow, and he would fight alongside Schlatt; fight to keep the conflict going as long as possible before he handed L'Manburg into Wilbur and Technoblade's capable clutches. There would be no returning from this defeat - he would make sure of it.

"Dream," came a voice which stopped him in his tracks.

George stood ten feet in front of him, arms crossed. His hair had grown and curled against the back of his neck. How long had it been since Dream last saw him? Weeks, he realized, with a jolt in his stomach. He had been stuck in a loop between his perch overseeing L'Manburg and the traitor's ravine. He hadn't needed to sleep, so he hadn't come home.

"What's going on?" George asked.

"What do you mean?"

George took a few careful steps towards him. "There are rumors of war," he said. "And you disappeared. Again."

"I didn't mean to," Dream said. "I lost track of time."

"People lose track of time for minutes, or hours," George said, stopping in front of him. "Not weeks. Not when it's us."

They had been through this conversation before, *many* times. It was starting to get annoying. "I said I didn't mean to," Dream said sharply. "What more do you want?"

It startled George, who dropped his hands to his sides, his eyes wide and betrayed.

"I don't know," he said, and shook his head. "I don't know anymore."

A cold wind swept between them.

“You’ve changed,” George said.

His words sparked some ancient emotion to life in Dream’s chest that he couldn’t quite name.

“I haven’t,” he said.

“You have, and you don’t even know it,” George said, his voice rising in pitch. “That’s the worst part of it.”

He started to turn his back and Dream surged forward, grabbing him by his wrist, stopping him. George didn’t flinch, but his brow furrowed, his jaw clenching. A voice - a voice in Dream’s head was thundering, *this is a distraction, this is temporary*, but a smaller one, a familiar one, was crying out for George.

“You said it yourself,” Dream said desperately. “If - as long as - as long as I love you, I haven’t changed. You said that, right?”

Shortly, George nodded.

“I still love you, George.” Automatic, instinctive. “I’m still myself.”

A shaky inhale. George said, “But do you, Dream? Actually?”

And Dream found the name for that forgotten feeling. *Fear*.

“People who love each other don’t abandon each other for weeks,” George was saying as Dream interrupted: “I do, George, I swear I do. I prove it, I’ll - what do you want? Anything, anything you want, I’ll do it for you. I will.”

“It’s not like that,” George said, pulling against Dream’s insistent grasp. “I don’t *want* anything from you.”

“I’ll make you king,” Dream said, the idea coming to him in a flash. “Eret’s been out of line recently anyway, and it’s time for his reign to be over. You’ll be important, George, you’ll be powerful. We’ll work together, it’ll be - it’ll be good. You’d like that, right? We’ll do it tomorrow. We’ll do it *today*. ”

George stared at him for an intolerably silent moment.

“Why would I want to be king?” he finally said.

It surprised Dream. “Why - why wouldn’t you?”

“You think I want power?” George asked, a sardonic laugh breaking through his words. “You - you think I’ve ever wanted power?”

“The election -,”

“- was a *joke* , a joke between me and Quackity, you don’t -,”

“Don’t act so naive, George. You knew what you were doing. Don’t tell me you don’t want more agency, more influence. Don’t tell me you’re content sitting on the roof of your house and fishing all day.”

George stopped. His face darkened.

“Things have changed,” Dream said, scrambling for ground. “It’s not about us, okay? It’s not about *me*. We’re just adapting. And - I’m sorry,” though he wasn’t, “about leaving you alone. I won’t do that anymore.”

George’s gaze shifted to the side, to the ground.

“George.” Dream brought George’s hand up to his mouth and kissed it, turned it carefully over to kiss into his palm, felt George shiver - or shudder - beneath him. “George, please. Look at me.”

And he did, their eyes meeting. The two of them, as it had always been.

“Let me prove it to you,” Dream said, bringing a hand up to George’s arm. “Let me make you king.”

He was unreadable, his face still, his eyes shining with something Dream couldn’t understand. But George eventually whispered, “Okay, Dream. Okay.”

---

Eret learned quickly how flimsy his claim to power was, and took flight towards L’Manburg without so much as a thrown fist or a drawn weapon. George looked good on the throne, the glint of the crown sharp against his dark hair, his gaze solemn and flat, like a king’s should be.

And it was good, as well, because Dream could trust George: could trust him not to do anything to get into his way, like Eret had been doing. He bent to one knee in front of George and kissed his hand, a smile playing at his lips, a joke which George turned his gaze away from. And then he left him. For more important matters.

By the time he reached L’Manburg, Schlatt was in a kind of broken hysteria, already drunk, and armorless. “No armor in Manburg,” he rasped to Dream. Though his breath was heavy with liquor, he spoke clearly. “It’s our *national principle*.”

He’d be dead before the day was up. Dream wasted no words on him. He turned to those who had chosen to fight with him, Sapnap and Punz among them, and said, “Don’t risk your lives in this fight. This ends today, but not with us.”

They nodded, confused yet compliant. Dream had given them a command, so they would follow it. (That cold crackle of satisfaction in his chest.)

Tommy and Technoblade led the straw army of traitors, Wilbur trailing behind, and the two sides clashed, arrows hailing against shields, blades sharpening blades. Dream caught Techno’s eye as he set off his rocket launcher, and from a mile away, they both laughed, their teeth bared to the sky. They may as well have been arm-wrestling.

Ultimately, Schlatt took care of himself. Cornered and friendless, he at least had the dignity to die of his own volition. Dream wondered, as he watched Tommy celebrate with Tubbo, if he realized what he had just seen. The last legitimate ruler of their illegitimate little country had just self-destructed, and now, Dream guessed by the manic gleam in Wilbur’s eye, so would the first.

Dream stood back and watched the pieces fall into place: Wilbur’s slinking away, and Tommy’s

little circus as he crowned Tubbo king of L'Manburg (he called him *President*, but there had been no election). Technoblade's scripted stand, as Dream moved behind him. The shock, and betrayal, and horrified realization on Tommy's face. Dream couldn't help but laugh, a chuckle sliding into a cackle, as Technoblade dug his hands into the earth and summoned those awful monsters, the ones he had told Dream about in secret (*destruction incarnate*, he'd said). And then there was the boar god, roaring to life as Technoblade took to the real war, the war against the land, the earth itself, the idea this country had come to represent. And there were the bombs, finally set into motion, chewing up the land in violent bites, the Withers going after their crumbs, wiping the country off the map, explosions and cries thickening the air.

And there was Wilbur with a sword in his chest, folded in the arms of his murderer father. Dream focused on them just in time to hear him cough, "See? Can you see it, Phil?"

The land screamed, scorched, smoldered to ash, and this time, it was right. It was right because it was over.

---

Dream found Technoblade at the edge of the occupied part of his territory, staring into the forest. There was blood staining his shirt, though it was invisible on his cloak. Dream wondered how much blood that fabric carried.

"I'm sorry about Wilbur," he said.

Techno quickly jerked his head, though Dream thought he might have seen a flash of emotion on his face. "He was temporary," Techno said. "Remember?"

"Right." The sun was starting to set in front of them. Dream could barely feel the touch of its rays on his face. "What will you do next?" he asked.

Techno rolled his shoulders. "I might stay here a while longer," he said, his gaze flicking towards Dream. "Phil wants to stay. Wants me to stay."

"Phil," Dream said, looking over his shoulder at the man who was waiting at the path, a bloodied sword in his hand, a blank, deadened expression on his face. "Who is he?"

"Someone important."

Dream snorted. "Someone temporary?"

Techno shrugged. "So you won't mind. If I stay here."

"Well. You've proven to me that you keep your word," Dream said. "If we both agree we don't want to fight, it shouldn't be a problem. Besides. The conflict is over, for good. L'Manburg is gone, and everyone can live in peace."

The other god gave him a long, measured glance. "Tell that to Tommy," he said, turning with a swish of his cape.

"What do you mean?" Dream said, turning and watching him meet Phil at the path.

Technoblade's face was grim. "He certainly doesn't seem to think it's over."

---

Tommy.

Tommy, who stood arrogantly in front of Dream clutching stolen items.

Tommy, who led the revolution in the war, who bargained for his country's freedom.

Tommy, who stoked the fires of the election, who refused to accept its outcome.

Tommy, who *chose* war, who *chose* conflict, again and again.

Tommy, who was refusing to accept his inevitable defeat.

They were rebuilding. Like little fucking cockroaches clinging onto their nest, they were stubbornly refusing to let their country die, rebuilding it plank by plank, stone by tedious stone. Dream watched, with cold fury pulsing in his chest, as Tubbo directed them as *President*, while Tommy ran around, wounded and weakened but obstinately fucking *cheerful*.

Dream's fists clenched, his shoulders a rigid line. He stalked down the path, into the wreckage of the forsaken country. He strode until he reached where Tommy stood, cleaning up debris at the bottom of the crater, and he grabbed him by the collar and slammed him up against the wall.

"Tommy," he hissed. "It's over. Give it up."

And Tommy just *grinned*.

"It's never over," Tommy said, defiant. "Not until I get back my discs."

*His discs?* Distantly, as though it were an old fable, Dream remembered those discs in his possession, collecting dust somewhere. Useless, meaningless.

"Until I get them back," Tommy was saying, "there's nothing you can do to stop me. You really should have figured that out by now, I mean -," he barked out a laugh, "you thought you were gonna get rid of me, eh? You'd have to kill me!"

Dream snarled and pressed him harder against the wall, and Tommy flinched, his eyes flaring with sudden fear.

But Dream knew, immediately, that he couldn't really kill Tommy. It would be the quickest route to perpetual conflict he could possibly take. He hadn't needed to kill anyone up until that point, and he didn't need to now.

Another part of him also knew that he could give Tommy back his discs. Hand them over and hope it satiated his endless need for conflict. Perhaps reverse their initial barter. His discs for L'Manburg's destruction. *Dust to dust*.

That thought hit a solid sheet of ice and drowned under its surface. Tommy would not beat him. Tommy would not be allowed to *win*.

Dream dropped him to the ground and watched Tommy stumble away, filling his laughed curses with bravado. It wasn't enough to destroy L'Manburg. It never had been.

He looked out over the crater left by his design, and started to plan.

## Chapter End Notes

:D? D:? :/? I would love to hear your thoughts <3

Thank you for everyone who has been following along with this story! The next chapter will be the last. I will see you then! :)

# nothing to pray to you now

## Chapter Notes

hello!! welcome to the final chapter of forwards, beckon, rebound! a few things before we start:

1. this chapter deals in part with the exile arc from the Dream SMP, and thus contains references to suicidal thoughts and actions, though nothing particularly graphic - please take care of yourself while reading!
2. this chapter is also the most canon-divergent chapter yet, but it still basically follows the arc of canon events; this will become obvious as you read, but I thought I'd make that clear.
3. if you haven't yet heard the song this fic is named after, I really highly recommend giving it a listen while you read. it's not required by any means, but the song is beautiful & really informs the story. plus, Adrienne Lenker just released [a music video for it](#) a few days ago, which is not only gorgeous but also motivated me to return to this chapter :)

finally, the BIGGEST thank you in the world goes to pryncedemeter and poisonsivy on ao3 for their help betaing this chapter - their help and feedback and support was so instrumental!! if you aren't already reading their stuff, it is literally your loss.

I really hope you enjoy the final chapter! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

What else was left to remember?

There was L'Manburg, clinging to life like a stubborn weed.

There was Tommy, as stupid and reckless and predictable as ever.

There was George, the new king, who seemed less interested in ruling and more interested in spending listless, lazy hours with Sapnap and Quackity.

And there was Dream. Dream, who watched over New L'Manburg, writing cold calculations into his heart. Who had a plan for Tommy. Who followed the sound of his friends' laughter only to hear it die away by the time he reached them.

One day, the trail of sound led Dream to a small house being built into the side of a hill. Dark, mossy wooden planks and the smell of earth. Mushrooms sprouting from the soil in soft clusters. George sat on the roof, his sleeves rolled up and hands rough with dirt, his sun-warmed face crinkling up with laughter as Quackity rambled on meaninglessly.



(There were many emotions Dream had lost since giving himself over to divinity, but jealousy was not one of them.)

Dream stood in front of the house, a bitter taste in his mouth. When George and Quackity noticed him, their conversation slowed to a trickle, then stopped. Quackity cleared his throat, got to his feet, and muttered a goodbye as he hurried in the opposite direction. George only stared.

“How are you?” Dream called. He walked around the fence and climbed up the soft springy grass on the side of the hill, sitting carefully at the top.

George’s gaze was flat.

“Making yourself a new house?” Dream asked. “An entire castle isn’t good enough for you?”

A shrug. “Castle’s too cold. Besides, I’ve never had my own house before.”

That stung. “What about ours?”

“That’s your house,” George said, picking up his hammer. “Not mine.”

The nail embedded into wood. Dream fought to keep himself from scowling.

“You know,” he said, “I don’t think you should be spending so much time with Quackity.”

That got George’s attention. “Why not?”

“You know he’s still a part of L’Manburg, right? That he’s in the cabinet?”

“Who cares?” George said.

“Who – who *cares*?” Dream asked incredulously. “George, you’re the King. You’re not supposed to be taking sides.”

“I’m not *taking sides*. Quackity is my friend, I’m not gonna –”

“He’s a politician, he’s probably just manipulating you –”

“Oh, shut up, Dream,” George snapped. “Leave me alone.”

A possessive cold stab in the center of his chest, a fast and blinding rage: George was supposed to listen to *him*, not *Sapnap*, certainly not *Quackity* –

He leaned forward and took George by the wrist, and George nearly lost his balance from how quickly he recoiled, pulling his hand away. Dream froze, and the two of them stared at each other, wide-eyed.

“Dream,” George said, a warning in his voice. “I said to leave me alone.”

Dream had to fight to unclench his jaw. “Fine,” he grit. “If that’s what you want.”

It wasn’t like Dream needed the company. Not at all. He – he was doing George a *favor*, had been for years, and if George was too blind and stupid to see that, then he wouldn’t waste his fucking time. Dream’s story eclipsed this minor conflict. He had isolated the cause of all of his problems and had crafted the solution.

Everything came down to Tommy.

---

The logic went like this:

L'Manburg was the separation, the act of division, that resulted in the perpetual conflict plaguing Dream's land. And L'Manburg lived as long as Tommy could bring life to it. Tommy was L'Manburg's breath, its blood, its heartbeat. There was no independence, no revolution, no resistance without Tommy.

But Dream couldn't kill him. The memory of a man could shoulder a heavier cause than he did in life. A martyr was the last thing Dream needed.

Not a saint, then, but a scapegoat. Tommy needed to be blamed. He needed to be broken. He needed to be defeated.

The task was simple enough. All Dream had to do was wait until Tommy did something worthy of punishment, which happened often, because Tommy was young and foolhardy and knew no life other than one of perpetual conflict. Dream would demand retribution. Threaten retaliation. Watch Tommy's friends turn on him, one by one, until he had no other option but to follow Dream's orders. Until Dream was fully in control.

A cold breeze swept through the streets on the day George's house burned down. Dream saw it happening, or rather felt it, like a shift in the air; an action that couldn't be retracted. He walked slowly towards the site, saw Tommy running away from the flames which licked up the side of George's house with wild abandon.

He stood at the entrance and watched the house burn to the ground with a smile spreading slow across his face. Planks of wood cracked and fell into the flames. The little red mushrooms, scorched black. The fire stark red against the deep blue night.

It was perfect.

---

And now.

The threat is made and made physical through the obsidian walls surrounding L'Manburg, quarantining the virus spread. Dream demands exile. Tubbo agrees to a summit. Tommy disappears; he is hiding or being kept under watch. His countrymen are starting to turn on him, even if he doesn't know it yet.

And George stands next to Dream on top of the hollow castle, the wind ruffling their hair and pulling at his cloak, asking, "Do you remember when we first came to this place?"

Dream studies him. His dark eyes, the curve of his brow. "Of course I do," he says; he remembers everything.

"Do you remember what you told me then?"

Dream lifts his chin. "I told you I would protect us."

George holds his gaze.

"I told you I would keep you safe."

George's lips purse. "And?"

"*And*, I told you things would be complicated."

"And?"

"And?" Dream parrots back at him, annoyed. "What do you want me to say, George? I told you lots of things, we've said lots of things, I don't –"

"You told me I wouldn't lose you," George says in a surge.

Dream freezes. The words ring, distant and bizarre, in his head.

"You told me you wouldn't misuse your power."

"I haven't. I only –"

"This isn't misuse?" George snaps, his gaze darkening. "Trapping people in – isolating a country because you want to punish a sixteen-year-old kid? Taking it all out on Tommy?"

"You know just as well as I do that Tommy is a liability and a danger," Dream says, anger snapping in his chest. How dare George speak to him like this, like *Dream* is in the wrong, like *he's* the one who corrupted this land and turned it into a place of war and politics and never-ending strife. "I'm trying to create *peace*. I'm trying to make this land safe."

"You're trying to control them," George says. "And you'll lose."

Dream grits his teeth, fury swirling like a blizzard, clouding his thoughts. "You have no right to speak to me like this."

George's face darkens.

"Just because I made you king –"

"I'm not speaking to you as king, Dream, I'm speaking to you as myself."

"Do you ever speak to me as king, George? I gave it to you because I thought you'd *listen* to what I told you, but you seem more interested in listening to your buddies –"

"Stop it," George says harshly. "You leave them out of this."

"Who?" Dream mocks. "Sapnap, the idiot, who doesn't know how to take two steps without me? You know he'd turn on you in a second if I told him to, right? Or Quackity, the traitor, who runs back to Tubbo every time shit gets real? You think either of them give a fuck about you, George? Because I guarantee they don't. And if you're too stupid to see that –"

"*STOP!*" George shouts, his voice bordering on a scream, and takes a hard step back. "Shut up, Dream!"

The space between them, only a few feet, a chasm.

“You don’t have as much power over people as you think,” George finally says.

He sounds like he’s trying to convince himself. He certainly isn’t convincing Dream, who tilts his head and says, “Don’t I?”

He holds his hand out, palm-up, over the rift. George stares at it uncomprehendingly.

“Give me your crown,” Dream says.

George’s gaze snaps to his. A disbelieving smile tugs at his mouth. “Really, Dream?”

“You don’t deserve it,” Dream says. “Eret made a better king.”

George laughs, though the sound holds no humor. He lifts the crown from his head, where its heavy imprint leaves a halo of dark soft hair. Carelessly, he throws it heavy and cold into Dream’s hands. “Take it. I never wanted it.”

Dream turns back towards L’Manburg, weighing the crown in his hands: the gold and the message it sends. “Go home, George.”

Instead, George shifts sharply towards him and grabs his face. Dream flinches back, but George isn’t attacking him – he’s just holding him by the jaw, forcing Dream to look at him. Their eyes meet: George’s, desperate and sincere – Dream’s, defensive and hostile.

George’s eyes flicker. He’s looking for something.

“I’m asking you,” he says.

And Dream remembers:

The path leading to their house. The breeze, playful and sweet. The land, unmarred and beckoning. George’s hand, his mouth soft under Dream’s, and the connection between them, private and precious and real. And George’s eyes, the same as they are now, dark and afraid, and his voice saying:

“I’m asking you not to do this,” he says, bringing both hands up to cup Dream’s face.

His touch burns.

Dream pulls away.

He takes one, two steps back. He watches George’s face fall.

“You think you understand, but you don’t,” he says, his voice suddenly hoarse. “I’m doing this for everyone. If you’re not going to help me –”

And he takes a step forward, but it’s not to touch, it’s to tower, rising to his full height and letting power lace into his words as George shrinks away.

“Stay the fuck out of my way.”

---

Tubbo may carry the authority of the Presidency, but he has fought and lost against Dream too many times not to be afraid of him.

(Sometimes, Dream thinks Tubbo still sees him as he was in the final control room, when the walls opened up around him, and the L'Manburgians, defenseless, were speared on their swords. Sometimes, he thinks Tubbo is stuck in the moment of the Festival: that he's been frozen in time with all of his childish excitement and optimism, hovering forever on the edge of that moment of terrible clarity.)

All it takes is a little harsh word and a sharp forward motion for Tubbo to wince and start talking about compromise, and satisfaction spreads cold in Dream's chest.

Tommy, naturally, fights back. He scratches and claws for leverage, for anything that might give him an advantage, and when he produces the pathetic piece of leather as something to hold over Dream, all he can do is laugh, a hysterical cackle bubbling out of his chest and freezing the grin on Tommy's face.

He brings them along, this time, so they can see how easy it is to build up those obsidian walls. It only takes an ounce of concentrated thought, barely more than a flick of his finger. He watches Tubbo's eyes turn large as dinner plates, Tommy's hands go weak at his sides. The walls stack higher and higher.

He puts his free hand on Tommy's shoulder, leans close, and hisses: "I don't give a *fuck* about that piece of leather, Tommy. Go ahead, burn it. You think I care? You think I couldn't remake it from the atoms in the air? You think I couldn't resurrect Spirit himself, if I wanted to?"

Tommy's face drains of color and he tries to pull away, but Dream's grip goes iron and he forces him around until they're staring into each other's faces.

"I could tear this country apart," he says, his voice rising, as Tommy's eyes flare. "I could rip up the earth and swallow it whole. I could – I could double the amount of TNT Wilbur used, I could *triple* it! I could bring this land down to bedrock, if I wanted to!"

Then he lifts his gaze and pins Tubbo to the spot; Tubbo, who isn't even trying to stop him. Who doesn't know how.

"But I don't want to do that," he says, almost kindly. Rationally. "All I'm asking is for you to punish your citizens appropriately. Tommy – Tommy here has proven that he can't follow the rules. So he needs to go."

He turns his gaze back to Tommy, sees the fright there and revels in it. "I want you *gone*."

And the boat is silent and cold on the way to Tommy's exile, the boy himself stunned into astonished silence, Dream facing forward to hide his eager grin. This is only the start.

---

There was a time when Dream was afraid of losing George, but now he sees that George was a dead weight all along. He doesn't need him, and it's good that he doesn't need to bother with him anymore.

He contracts Sam to build a prison for him. He wants it to be perfect, a pit from which no one can

escape. He doesn't know who he'll need it for – Tommy, if his plan doesn't work, or Technoblade, if he ever changes his mind about peace. He trusts Sam to build it; Sam, who was here from the start, who has always treated Dream with the respect he deserves, who is hard-working and transparent and true to his word.

(Sam asks after George and Dream ignores him.)

Dream pays Sam well. He pays Punz, too, as a kind of mercenary. Punz follows Dream's instructions, watches after L'Manburg, and reports back to him what he's heard. He's an adequate replacement for Sapnap, who is nowhere to be found.

(Maybe George told him what Dream said. It doesn't matter.)

Every day, without fail, he visits Tommy.

He visits Tommy and speaks to him. Watches, in real time, as Tommy falls into ruin. He can't go home; Dream won't let him. His clothes start to tear. His eyes go dim. His hands shake while Dream helps him with basic tasks, and Dream wonders if he's eating. It's not that Tommy is incapable of taking care of himself, it's that he's starting to not want to. He doesn't do well on his own, he mutters to Dream. He doesn't know what he did to deserve this.

It's perfect. It's exactly what Dream wants.

He wants Tommy like this, lonely and compliant and desperate for company. He wants Tommy to lean on him, to confide in him when he's feeling sad or angry or scared. He wants Tommy to trust him, to *listen* to him, to follow his instructions.

The training is methodical like it is for an animal. Every day, he destroys Tommy's armor in front of him. Negative reinforcement when he fights back, positive reinforcement when he complies. By the second week, Tommy stops arguing entirely. The fire has drained out of his eyes.

Nobody interferes. A few of them could, but Dream takes care of them.

He thinks Techno might have stopped by near the beginning, but Tommy's own pride took care of that potential complication.

He informs Tubbo that Tommy does not want to see him, and further that he shouldn't be seen visiting someone he's exiled – if he wants his decisions to be taken seriously, that is. Tubbo, who is young and unsure of himself and desperate to be a good leader, believes him.

He tells the ghost of Wilbur, who haunts L'Manburg with a hollowed-out voice and a vacant smile, to take a long trip, far away. He tells him, "Tommy doesn't want to see you. Don't you remember what you did to him while you were alive?" and the ghost flees before Dream needs to go any further.

There's nobody left to stop him but Tommy himself, then, and Tommy breaks easier than Dream thought he would. He starts to throw his armor unprompted to the ground, starts to smile when he sees Dream approaching.

Maybe he breaks a little too well. In the days before Christmas, Dream lets him get close; they travel through the Nether together, Tommy nearly skipping with anticipation. But when they reach the portal to home, Tommy slows to a halt. Through the distorted shifting purple of the gate, he can see the cheery Christmas decorations strung up around homes and buildings. He can hear the happy shouts and pealing laughter of his friends. He can barely find the smell of peppermint and freshly baked bread.

L'Manburg has not frozen in time; it has moved on without him. Maybe Dream's words to him are not so far from reality.

Tommy takes a half-step towards that vision and Dream puts an arm in front of him, stopping him. "It's not for you," he says, and Tommy closes his eyes.

That day, Dream finds Tommy staring into the lava with longing rather than fear, his arms wrapped around himself, shivering and searching for warmth.

It infuriates Dream. He places a hand on his shoulder and shoves him back. Tommy sees his disapproval and wilts and doesn't do it again.

Tommy does not get to choose when his story is over.

(George's voice: *You're going too far. I'm asking you to stop.*)

---

At night, when there's nobody to oversee, Dream walks through his forest and listens to it speak. He feels the places where it's wounded and scarred. He knows that some of these marks were left by his hands. He knows he is at least partially to blame. His land knows it, too, but his land has no independent will to blame him or separate itself. The land moves underneath his control; the trees bend, the earth shakes, the sky collects in blanket-folds when he pulls it down in his hand.

"If only everything were so easy to control," Dream murmurs to the crumpled sky, and watches the distressed twist of the stars.

---

Tommy disappears. In his place, a crater burnt into the earth. In his place, a tower scraping the sky.

Dream can explain the crater; he left it there, the day before, when he found Tommy's little hiding place underneath the base Dream allowed him. He had felt the emptiness of the earth under his feet. It only took a second to find the diamonds, the weapons, the armor.

Before he had even looked up, Tommy was apologizing: "Dream, I didn't mean anything by it, I didn't mean anything by it, I swear. I wasn't trying to go against you," as Dream stood and willed the explosives into his hands, "I wasn't trying to fight you, please don't – don't –, " as Dream placed them not only in the pit, but around the perimeter of his base. "Dream, I'm sorry, please don't – I won't have a place to sleep, I can't rebuild this by my – you can't do this, it isn't right," as Dream lit the fuse, "Dream, *please!*"

He can explain the crater, but he can only guess about the tower. An escape attempt, maybe.

Tommy isn't dead, though. He would know it if he were. And there is no body.

Dream sends his power crackling into the earth, a surge of ice in his blood, and finds Tommy's footsteps, stumbling unevenly away from the site. He follows them steadily. Tommy was limping. Maybe he hurt himself on the climb down from his tower. He leads Dream north, into the cold.

He'll have to be punished again for trying to escape, but it's okay. This is a minor setback and Dream is playing the long game.

Tommy's footsteps lead Dream past a village, where it seems like he stopped briefly, perhaps to get out of the snow constantly drifting from this region's graying sky. Dream is less familiar with this land, lying just outside of where he usually draws his borders.

Finally, Tommy's footsteps slow. Dream looks up and sees the outline of a small cabin jutting over the frozen horizon, smoke curling lazily from its chimney. Tommy's steps hesitate, circle back, then head again towards the house. He's uncertain and desperate. Dream doesn't know who lives here, but he knows it won't matter.

Technoblade answers the door and Dream grins in surprise.

"Technoblade," he says in greeting as Techno's eyebrows raise slightly in surprise. "Is Tommy here?"

Because he is. That much is obvious. If Dream tried a little harder, he could probably pinpoint exactly where he is. But he won't have to, because he and Techno have an agreement. He and Techno are on good terms, and there's absolutely no reason for Techno to tilt his head, like he's thinking, or cross his arms, like he's defensive, and there's especially no reason for him to say, "No."

Dream stills. He studies Technoblade's face, human and unreadable, his eyes sharp through the angular frames of his glasses.

"Are you sure?" he asks.

Techno purses his lips. "Haven't seen him."

A moment of silence, the snow falling in muffled flurries around them. Techno's breath huffs warm in the cold air, but Dream feels no difference in his lungs. They both know what's happening here.

"You know, Techno," Dream says, "you kind of owe me a favor."

An arched eyebrow. "Do I."

"Yeah," Dream says, "you do."

"Whatever for."

"For letting you stay here. For letting you keep your" – Dream jerks his head towards the second blue cloak on the wall – "temporary friend."

Techno's eyes widen, though it looks like he's holding back a smile. Dream doesn't know what part of this is funny. "You mean Phil?"

"Yeah."

"Phil can take care of himself."

"Can he?"

Every word a veiled threat. Laced with a promise, threaded with a question: are we doing this?



Eventually, Techno shakes his head. “Tommy’s exiled from L’Manburg, right?”

“Right,” Dream grits.

“We’re not in L’Manburg, are we?”

“No, but –”

“Then unless you’re prepared to get past me,” and Techno’s head lowers and shifts into the wild boar, dangerous and unfiltered and ready for a fight, “I think we’re done here.”

And Dream considers it.

But when he clenches his fists, he realizes that the cold he’s feeling is artificial and surface-level; that the power he’s used to have crackling through his veins splutters and melts.

Techno laughs at the look on his face. “What’s wrong? Too far from home?”

Dream glowers, hisses, “This isn’t over,” and stalks away.

Techno calls after him, condescension curling the edges of his words. “Come visit anytime!”

He’s going to have to finish that prison sooner than he thought.

---

(Because Tommy doesn’t get to decide how his exile works, Tommy doesn’t get to be with other people, Tommy doesn’t get to cower behind another protector who will only make things worse for everyone.)

If Technoblade won’t listen to him, Dream will put him in the prison to rot, and if Tommy won’t fall in line after that, he’ll go in there as well, and then Tubbo, and Eret, and Sapnap and George and Quackity, if they want, and even the harmless ones like Phil and Niki and Ant – there’s a room for everyone who needs one. The prison will always be an option, standing severely in the long shadow of the castle, lurking like an austere alternative to the safe and happy life Dream is trying to build for everyone that they keep fucking *rejecting*.

The prison is full of complex and coordinated machinery, which Sam explains to him in excruciating detail. There is something increasingly strange about the prison, something detached from the land, detached from his influence over it. Sam is creating something so divorced from the natural, so atomized and regulated, that even Dream has difficulty altering it. It’s good; it means it will be strong enough to hold Techno.

One night, as he helps Sam place piece after piece of obsidian, their conversation peters out, leaving them in a tactful silence. The moon’s weak light is swallowed and extinguished in the perfect black of the prison roof.

And Sam asks: “Who are we building this for?”

Dream sighs. “Anyone who needs it.”

Sam hums and slides another obsidian brick into place, his hands skilled and sure. “I wish things could be like they used to,” he says carefully. “When we all just got along with each other.”

“I do too, Sam,” Dream says. “I really do.”

---

Tommy returns to L’Manburg as surely as the tide to the shore. He does it first as a sort of antagonist, which is fine – that will divorce him even further from the group, Dream thinks – but even then, there’s something dangerous about it, some potential for reconciliation. And then Punz informs Dream of a plot by the New L’Manburgians – to kill him.

It would make Dream laugh if it didn’t make him seethe, dismissing Punz with a bark so he can stalk up and down the halls of the community house, passing empty room after empty room. He’s the only one who lives here these days. The house is cold and still, interrupted only by his heavy footsteps and frustrated mutters.

“They’re idiots,” he seethes to himself, “*idiots*, all of them.”

He needs to do something more. He needs to do something worse. He needs to give them a common enemy that isn’t him, and the idea comes to him in a flash: Technoblade, Tommy alongside of him. Hand them over to the angry mob, let them tear each other to shreds. And when they face what they’ve done, with Tommy’s blood on their hands, L’Manburg will be destroyed.

This is his flawed line of logic when he destroys the community house.

It is, after all, the oldest place on the server, the only place that every single person here has a connection with. Dream used to count himself among them but he knows – he knows this house is just a structure of brick and wood, temporary and meaningless except for the meaning assigned to it. And Dream assigns no meaning to it. He assigns meaning to nothing except the one thing he cares about, the one thing he’s always cared about, which is making this land *safe*, making it *peaceful*, making it *his*.

He douses the community house with gasoline. He stands in front of it on the path, alone. The night air is clear and close-knit. The stillness surrounding him gives every movement meaning.

(The memory of George threatens to slide its hand into his. The memory of Sapnap shouts at him from inside, the memories of Sam and Alyssa fish from the roof, the memory of Callahan waves from the water’s edge. Dream feels a brief, ever-brief, ever-fading rush of warmth in his chest, hears something pleading with him, *please, not this*.)

He lights the match.

The community house is devoured in a single searing breath, the flames tearing up the side of the house, licking at the curtains and turning them to tatters, peeling pieces of wood from the brick and sending them crashing to the ground. Debris slowly fills the lake; the soot sinks heavy, clogging the water. Will the fish survive? Are there still fish in this water?

Dream stokes the fire when it threatens to die out. He makes sure it claims everything. He returns it all to dust.

He will do this to every last structure living on his land, if he has to.

---

The next day is the date of his supposed execution, but instead Dream leads them to the community house and lets them panic and shout and ask, “Who did this?”

“Who else?” he says, watching the entire population of his land scramble around the remaining ruins of the community house, looking for anything salvageable. “Tommy. And Techno.”

Tubbo shrinks, and Fundy’s ears pin to the back of his head, and Niki looks like she might be capable of murder.

(But Sam just stares at him with this sad, dark look.)

“You’re wrong!” comes a sudden shout, and then Tommy is standing in front of him, scowling, the effects of his invisibility potion wearing thin. “This wasn’t me!”

He’s regained some of his rebellious spark, Dream notes unhappily. It’ll die out soon enough. “You can’t keep lying to everyone, Tommy,” Dream says, lifting his voice. “I cared about this place! We all cared about this place! You can’t keep destroying –”

“Tommy,” Tubbo interrupts. “Was this really you?”

Tommy looks to him. He walks close, grabs Tubbo’s hand, and Tubbo doesn’t fight it. “Tubbo,” he says. “I swear on my life” – turning to everyone else – “I swear on my *discs* I didn’t do this.”

“I’ve been with him,” says Technoblade, and Dream flinches and turns to see the wild boar pacing towards the group, his dark glassy eyes pinned on Dream. “It wasn’t him.”

(Sam’s gaze hasn’t wavered.)

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Dream says, and Tommy responds with a cry, “No, *you* listen to me!” and the group falls still.

Tommy is glaring, pulling himself up. He’s regained something, some spirit, that Dream thought he had destroyed in exile. “This is Dream’s fault,” he says, his voice carrying strength. “Dream is – he’s fucking evil, he is. He’s been manipulating me. He’s been manipulating all of us.” He turns back to Tubbo and grabs for his hand. “He’s driven us apart. We never should have let that happen.”

And Tubbo – Tubbo nods – and this –

Dream feels this spiraling out of control.

“Tommy,” he snaps, “shut *up*,” and takes a harsh step forward, making Tommy wince.

Technoblade is there immediately, standing in between them. “Don’t get any closer.”

Every gaze is pointed at him, he realizes. They’re grabbing their weapons, they’re setting their stances. They were going to kill *him* today. They were going to *kill him*, and now Tommy and Techno are on their side, and –

Dream grins at them, wild, feeling something snap and let loose inside of him, some frantic freeze that cracks sharply in his chest. It manifests in a laugh, harsh and nearly painful.

“You know what?” he breathes. “It’s time for this to be done.”

He brings his hands up and crashes down the last vestiges of the walls, dust billowing into the air as scattered shouts ring out. Amidst the chaos, he stalks towards L'Manburg.

"Stop him!" Tommy cries, and Dream slides into a run. Some manic happiness rises up inside of him, and when he reaches the country, which is empty and built over a crater and just *waiting* to be destroyed, he climbs into the air as though on invisible stairs, unattached and untouchable. He stops a mile above the crater Wilbur left behind. Above the country they all tried so violently to save.

The rest of the useless group is rushing towards him, Technoblade and Tommy among them, but they're all land-locked and their arrows are futile at this distance. Dream laughs and laughs, the power dizzying and giddy in his head and chest, and he reaches down and starts to rip up L'Manburg from its roots, feels the earth start to tear from its very mooring. The entire nation is ripped from its foundation and hovers unbelievably in the air.

"This is over," Dream says, and he destroys it.

There are screams – vaguely, he registers Tubbo grabbing Tommy just before he can be pulled into the abyss – and it is an abyss – Dream is finishing what Wilbur started, what Wilbur didn't have the courage or the capacity to do, which is finally, finally, reduce this place to dust. He crushes and crumbles it underneath him, every foot of the traitor country, every inch of the rot infesting his land, infesting his home. This place, these people, they've caused so much goddamn *nuisance*, and it feels *right* to assert his control over it again, it feels *good* to dictate what it will be. It will be nothing more than earth and ash. Dream digs deeper, goes further, as the buildings capsize and splinter and crash and are swallowed up by the earth; Technoblade is shouting something, but it doesn't matter; he may be powerful, but he can't reach Dream up here, he can't fight him on his own domain; Dream laughs and tastes blood in his mouth and doesn't care –

Something slams into him and he falls, catching himself mid-air, scrambling to his feet just in time to see a blade swiping a vicious arc towards his head. He dodges and whirls to face Phil – *Phil?* – who –

Who *shines*, with some kind of divine light, whose face shifts so that Dream can't ever quite make out its form, at once a lion, an eagle and a man. Behind him stretch four wings made of pure blinding darkness, like a void ripping through the reality of the sky, and covered with eyes – hundreds of eyes blinking constantly in and out of existence. There's a tidal wave of energy that knocks Dream back a few steps, and Phil – Phil is –

"You're a god," Dream gasps, "*how?*"

When Phil speaks, it's with many voices.

"So arrogant," he says, angry and wise and condescending and amused. "You young ones, bleeding out all over the place, practically begging to be found. You don't think we've learned to keep ourselves hidden?"

His wings lash through the air like lightning and he's on Dream in less than the space of a blink, ramming against him and sending him tumbling. He grasps for leverage but feels Phil's power halt the atoms in the air, and he falls like a stone, his back slamming into the torn-up earth and collapsing the breath in his chest. From above, Phil cracks towards him.

One thought: it doesn't end like this.

Dream gathers rocks around his fist and slams it into Phil's chest as he lands, throwing him off

balance for a second so that Dream can scramble to his feet. He grabs for a weapon, finds it in the air, and slashes his sword down on Phil's head – but it's caught by a shield, and Technoblade shoves him back, filling the air with the metal scent of blood. And then the two of them are clashing, equal and opposite forces finally meeting, vicious, violent, furious. Dream feels each blow resonate down to his center, grits his teeth and gives himself over to the fight: he becomes nothing but the action, the motion, the burn and tear of muscle. What remains of L'Manburg shakes and crumbles beneath them.

Dream will win. Technoblade may be a war god but Dream is the earth itself, this land is *his*, *he speaks to it*; he finds his focus and concentrates it, for a second, on swallowing Techno whole and crushing him miles below the surface of the earth, and a crack starts to form under Techno's feet.

Before it can open, there is a thunder-crack from behind, a foot on Dream's back which slams him face-first to the ground. Dream shoves desperately up but something even stronger crushes him down; he tries again and *fails*; he tries *again*;

“Let me go!” he cries, and realizes he's being surrounded by those void-wings, that lack of space, an empty chasm that glitters like crystal. Phil's wings are isolating him, severing from his land, from his power. He grasps for it and doesn't find it – a phantom limb. He is alone, he is – he is falling – he hears –

“Do we kill him?” Technoblade says from a million miles away.

“Do we have another choice?” Phil responds grimly. “He's obviously lost control.”

“*NO!*” Dream screams, his voice muffled and falling fast to silence.

“It's all gone,” he hears Tommy say with grief, “L'Manburg,” and the voice sends such pure rage ripping through him that he just barely throws Phil's wings off of him, manages one stab of power in Tommy's direction before he's forced down again by wings and a pair of strong hands. “Fuck *OFF!*” Tommy screams, stubbornly alive.

“That's it,” Technoblade says, closer this time – it's his hands on Dream's arms, pinning him down. “It's time to end this.”

*NO – NO – NO –*

“Stop,” says one more voice, and Techno goes still.

Dream opens his eyes, blind and black-filled, flickering desperately. Looking for him.

“We have another option,” says George.

---

This.

This is worse than death.

They wrestle him inside his own prison. They throw him into his cell.

It was built strong enough to hold a god. It was built strong enough to hold Dream.

The irony of it, the pure, bitter humor of the whole thing makes Dream laugh. It's a hysterical, panicked laugh, but it's a laugh all the same. He placed the obsidian that he's scraping his fingernails against. He wrote the designs for the lava that pours down all around him, enclosing him. This is *his* prison. This is his doing.

He tries to escape. He tries to crack the glass, but the awful effects of Sam's magic drain his strength. He tries to move the obsidian, but it won't listen to him. Sometimes, he tries to bring the lava close enough to burn his skin, but it never moves.

Dream is dull, listless, weak.

He sits in the center of his cell and he rots.

This is worse than death.

When they first put him in here he fought back. He screamed and tore against their grip, but nothing could stop the inevitable. Phil and Techno together were too strong. When they finally locked him behind the impenetrable glass barrier, he had slammed his fists into it again and again, staring desperately into Technoblade's neutral, impassive face.

"You let me out of here," he cried. "You let me the *fuck* out of here!"

Technoblade's mouth twitched. "The people want to live peacefully," he said. "You were makin' that impossible."

"*Bullshit*," Dream hissed. "You can't do this to me. You can't *fuck*ing do this to me."

"And why not?" Techno asked, his gaze cold.

"You can't treat me like – like one of them!" Dream shouted, his voice taking on an inhuman quality as his power started to snap, lashing against the walls in dizzying whips. His deity tore itself to shreds searching for some weakness, some fallibility in the design – but he knew, even then, it wouldn't find any. He made sure of it himself.

Technoblade had looked at him with pity, then, which was even worse. "We are them," he said, shaking his head. "Losin' sight of that is what gets you stuck in a place like this."

"Techno," Dream said desperately, as he turned his back. "*TECHNO!*"

"I'll come back to visit," he said, and walked to meet Sam – and, Dream realized, George, who was staring at him so, so sadly.

"George," Dream had begged, and then, when he didn't move, angrily: "George! *George!* George, you let me the *fuck OUT OF HERE! GEORGE!*"

George flinched and turned away.

There's no use for displays like that anymore, and nobody to witness them, anyway. Dream sits in his cell and he rots, and he feels himself drain slowly away.

Tommy visits him, days or weeks later.

He sits on the opposite side of the glass. Dream barely looks at him.

"Thought I'd come keep you company," Tommy says. "Return the favor."

Dream doesn't respond.

"What have you been doing in here? Keeping yourself busy?"

Dream's eyes flicker briefly upwards.

"I hope you haven't been too comfortable," Tommy says with a grin, but Dream knows he doesn't really mean it. Tommy is too soft and too good to wish real harm on anyone. And it sickens him and awakens some little part inside of him that still feels anger, that still is capable of lashing out.

"I should have let you die," Dream spits.

Tommy's eyes widen.

"I should have let you kill yourself."

Tommy scrambles to his feet. "Techno told me I shouldn't visit –"

"I should have *made* you kill yourself," Dream says, standing and rushing forward just to see the way Tommy flinches back, the way he's still afraid of him.

"You couldn't have," Tommy says, glaring.

Dream snarls. "Oh, but I could have. I can do anything, haven't you learned?"

Tommy backs towards the exit. "Sam?"

"Can't you see the story isn't over? I'm going to win, Tommy, I'm going to get out –"

"Sam!"

"And when I do, you're fucking dead, Tommy. You're going to lose *everything*."

"*SAM!*"

The lava parts and Dream falls back into a sitting position, watching with satisfaction as Tommy pauses briefly in the hallway.

"You don't control everything," Tommy says bravely. "And you won't win. We beat you, Dream. You're trapped in here. And I'm free."

Maybe he's right. But he's still trembling when he leaves.

These days, Dream takes power where he can get it.

---

There's only one other person who would want to visit him, and it takes him several months to do it.

Dream is hollowed-out and empty by the time it happens. He has folded further and further into himself until there is no Dream, and there is no cell, and there is no bitter, dying deity still tearing his chest to shreds. But when George appears on the other side of the glass, he feels a flicker – of something. He doesn't know how to identify it anymore.

“George,” he says. His voice is hoarse and cracks with the effort.

George is clearly horrified at his appearance. He stands, stock-still, as though he hasn’t decided whether he’s staying or not.

Dream gestures forward – his first outward motion in several weeks. “Please, sit, I’m – I’m happy to see you.”

George moves slowly, as though approaching a wild animal. He sits, his eyes scouring Dream’s face. Looking for something.

Dream clears his throat. “How – how are you?”

A flicker of annoyance, or maybe amusement. “We’re doing small talk?”

Dream laughs softly, a little smile surprising him. “I missed you.”

Does he mean it? Does it matter anymore?

Either way, it looks like it hurts George, who recoils. “You understand what you did?” he asks. “You know why you have to be here?”

Dream casts his mind back and tries to think.

“You think I did something wrong,” he eventually says.

Grief shades George’s face. “You did.”

“I hurt you.”

“You hurt a lot of people.”

“I was trying to keep everyone safe.”

“No,” George says ruefully. “You were trying to control everyone.”

“There’s no difference between those things,” Dream says. The words come from somewhere lost inside of him. “Controlling everyone was the only way to keep them safe.”

George shakes his head. “You think that’s true, but it’s not.”

Dream takes a breath in.

“I told you,” George says. “I told you what would happen, if you tried. I told you you’d lose everything. Do you remember?”

All Dream does is remember. All he does is sit here, day after lightless day, night after sleepless night, and remember. The journeys through jungles and endless deserts with George and Sapnap. The wheat fields they planted on the lake. The horse Dream tamed and brought miles back home. The path through the wilderness they built plank by plank. The spruce trees, and the rushing river, and the solemn mountains, and everything used to be so *beautiful* –

“Of course I do,” Dream says, and realizes there are tears on his face.

George is crying, too. “I knew this would happen,” he whispers. “All that time I spent, trying to pull you back, trying to remind you of who you were, and I still knew. I knew I would lose you.”



The words, *you haven't lost me*, die before they can form in Dream's mouth. He knows they're a lie.

"George," he says instead, a broken plea. "George, get me out of here. Please get me out of here. I can't do it myself, you have to – you have to get me *out* of here."

George's face immediately shutters, the emotion in his eyes fading. "You know I can't do that."

"Talk to Sam." Dream leans forward, presses his hands up against the glass, and George looks away. "You can talk to him. He's – he's your friend. George –"

"I *can't*," George says. "It's not my decision, and –"

"You can convince them, you *can* –"

"I wouldn't do it even if I could," George cuts him off.

Dream goes very still.

"I'll come back, though," George says, as though that matters at all. "I'll come talk to you more often, if – if you want me to. I'll –"

"You'll pity me," Dream snarls, and sees a familiar fear in his eyes. "You'll sit on the other side of the glass and feel bad for me, and give me that sad pathetic fucking look, like you aren't the one doing this to me. *You're* the one doing this to me, George, *you're* the one who told them to put me here –"

"I saved your life!"

"You betrayed me!" Dream cries with two voices.

George stands abruptly. "This was a mistake."

And Dream scrambles to his feet, too, feels the weakness in his legs. "Don't leave."

"Sam," George calls.

"*Please*, George, I'm – I'm sorry, please don't go," Dream says, his fingers clawing desperately against the glass. "George –"

"Sam!"

"*Listen to me!*" Dream screams, his voice ringing off the glass. George jerks his head towards him as Dream says, "If you'd just *fucking listen to me* and do what I fucking *told you*, George, then maybe I wouldn't be in this hellhole in the first place!"

He smashes his foot into the glass as his power lashes out, bashing against the barrier, and George stumbles back. The lava opens up behind him, giving him a way home. But George pauses for one moment longer.

He comes close to the glass. The two of them are suddenly eye-to-eye. George's gaze seems to pierce right down to the center of him, but what he finds doesn't satisfy him. He's looking for something that isn't there anymore.

"If you are still in there," George whispers, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I couldn't save you from this."

George turns and disappears into the path that carves through the lava, which swallows up the space he leaves behind.

Watching him leave drives a dagger of ice through the middle of Dream's chest. A cold that spreads, and freezes, and finally consumes.

## Chapter End Notes

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## End Notes

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